7 August 2000
English
Original: French

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2000

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Peter **Van De Velde** (Belgium)

I. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs; consultations with or letters to bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. Since 1983, the Committee on Conferences has studied a series of reports containing the meeting statistics and, in more recent years, the documentation statistics of a core sample of United Nations organs in New York, Geneva and Vienna. Statistics on bodies meeting in Nairobi have been included since 1998.

2. At its 429th meeting, on 7 August, the Committee reviewed the report of the Secretary-General on meeting statistics of United Nations organs that had met in 1999 (A/AC.172/2000/3/Rev.1).

3. In section B, paragraph 6, of its resolution 54/248 of 23 December 1999, the General Assembly reiterated its request to the Committee on Conferences to continue to consult with those bodies that consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.

4. In paragraph 7 of the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences to transmit a letter to the chairpersons of all bodies that had utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure (80 per cent) of their allocated conference resources in the previous year, informing them of the problem and drawing their attention to the significant loss of meeting

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time, with a view to encouraging appropriate action on their part so as to improve the utilization of conference-servicing resources.

5. At the same meeting, the Committee considered an oral report made by the Chairperson on the actions taken pursuant to the requests set out in paragraphs 3 and 4 above.

Discussion

6. The view was expressed that the Secretariat should continue its efforts to ensure that unutilized conference resources were reallocated by sensitizing the chairpersons of intergovernmental bodies to the need to consistently utilize the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources. The Committee discussed a number of ways in which this goal could be accomplished. These included eliminating, as far as possible, avoidable cancellations of meetings; convening meetings in a timely manner, without a quorum, if necessary; scheduling, to the extent possible, informal consultations with interpretation services; cancelling scheduled meetings in advance, particularly if no delegation expresses a wish to speak, and holding working groups in their place; if time remains at the end of a scheduled meeting, considering other items or holding informal consultations; and making efforts to improve the accuracy with which the number of fully serviced meetings required is forecast. It was also suggested that chairpersons should institute time limits for the presentation of standard documents by the Secretariat.

7. It was acknowledged, however, that the working methods of committees varied significantly and that, in some cases, such as that of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the volume of work and documentation was so high that it was mandatory to use time available to review documentation, prepare for upcoming items and review the Committee's own draft report on an ongoing basis. Any approach to the problem should take account of such constraints.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. The Committee took note with appreciation that the overall utilization factor for 1999 was 81 per cent, exceeding the benchmark of 80 per cent, and that the decrease of one and four percentage points in Vienna and Geneva respectively was offset by a two-percentage-point gain in New York.

9. It noted, however, that in 1999 only 59 per cent of the bodies in the sample utilized 80 per cent or more of their available conference-servicing resources and expressed its continuing concern at the low rate of compliance.

10. The Committee took note of the oral report by the Chairperson on the actions taken pursuant to the requests of the General Assembly set out in section B, paragraphs 6 and 7, of its resolution 54/248 concerning utilization of conference services and requested the Chairperson to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.

11. The Committee noted with appreciation the new format for the report of the Secretary-General, which clearly indicated which bodies had made effective

use of their conference resources and which had underutilized the resources allocated to them.

12. The Committee welcomed the incorporation of the statistics for Nairobi in the analytical tables contained in the report.